



Office of the State Fire Marshal

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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KEEP YOUR FAMILY SAFE THIS WINTER

November through February are leading months for carbon monoxide related incidents

SPRINGFIELD— With cold temperatures on their way, the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal encourages residents to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning by ensuring their homes have working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless and tasteless gas byproduct of burning fossil fuels. At elevated levels, carbon monoxide (CO) causes sickness and, if not detected, death. Simply having working carbon monoxide detectors in your home and regularly testing them can prevent awful consequences.

Fossil fuels like natural gas are used to heat the vast majority of American homes, and faulty heating equipment accounts for nearly one third of accidental carbon monoxide deaths. These can include your home heating system, improperly vented gas appliances, kerosene or propane space heaters, charcoal grills and Sterno-type fuels.

“Most carbon monoxide fatalities happen in the winter months when residents understandably dial up their thermostats,” said State Fire Marshal Matt Perez. “Make sure your home has working carbon monoxide alarms so if something goes wrong with your heating system, you know when to get outside.”

Perez also reminds residents to never use a gas generator, grill, oven or range to heat the inside of their home or garage.

Under the Carbon Monoxide Alarm Detector Act (Public Act 094-0741), enacted in 2007, all homeowners, landlords and building managers must install carbon monoxide alarms within 15 feet of every room used for sleeping purposes. The alarms must be in operating condition.

Illinois reported 11,481 carbon monoxide related incidents to the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) in 2013. Due to the increased use of carbon monoxide detectors in the last decade, the number of reported incidents has gone up while the number of carbon monoxide fatalities has steadily gone down.

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Symptoms of CO poisoning are very similar to those of the flu and include headache, fatigue, shortness of breath, nausea and dizziness. Other signs of possible CO presence include condensation on walls and windows, house plants dying, house pets becoming sluggish and chronic odors from malfunctioning appliances. If you suspect you may be experiencing carbon monoxide poisoning, go outside for fresh air immediately and call 911 either on your mobile phone outside or from a neighbor's home.

The OSFM recommends the following tips to help prevent CO poisoning:

- Make sure you have working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors with fresh batteries.
- Put carbon monoxide detectors/alarms on each floor of a home and within 15 feet of each sleeping area.
- Check CO detectors once a month and be familiar with the sounds that the detector makes.
- CO detectors have a limited operating life. Check the manufacturer's instructions for information on replacement.
- Never use a generator, grill, stove, or other fossil fuel-burning device inside a home, garage, or other enclosed area.
- Never heat a home with an oven.
- Keep interior and exterior air vents clear of blockages or obstructions.
- Make sure appliances are installed by a qualified technician and operated according to the manufacturer's instructions and local building codes.
- Have your building's heating system inspected and serviced annually; change or clean furnace filters regularly.
- Have chimney or appliance vents cleaned and inspected for leakage, debris blockages, or a buildup of creosote. If you see black stains on the outside of the chimney or flue, it could mean pollutants are leaking into your home.

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